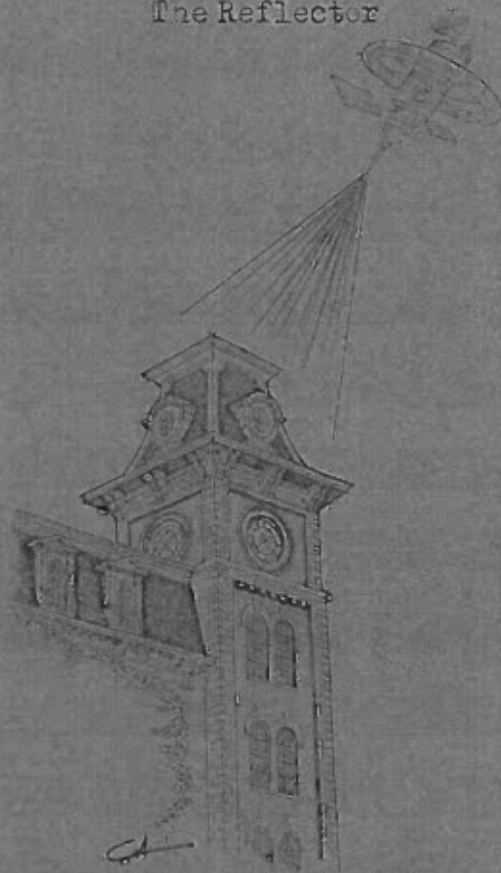


The Reflector



Shippensburg University  
Fall 1989

How to Write Realistic Science Fiction

An Interview with William Shatner  
Author of TekWar  
by Kyra Maggie Goulart

For this issue we are proud to have an instructional and informational article for our readers who are also authors.

One of our contributing editors, Kyra Maggie Goulart, got an exclusive interview with her uncle Ron Goulart, who gave a few pointers to his friend, none other than the great Captain Kirk himself, William Shatner, with his first novel, Tek Wars. Mr. Shatner and Mr. Goulart invited further questions after a short phone interview, and sent their answers via a facsimile message a few days later. The following is a composite interview made up of the phone interview and answers they sent later.

Reflector: So, how did you get the idea for Tekwars?

WS: During Hooker. At first it was going to be basically TJ Hooker in space, starring me. But I never had time to do anything with it until the writers

strike stalled Star Trek V. So when writers in Hollywood were supposed to stop writing... I started writing. I guess its the rebel in me.

Reflector: Mr Goulart, how did you get involved in the project?

RG: I started writing sci fi and mysteries in the 50s and did reviews, advertising, scriptwork, and many science fiction stories and books, including several Battlestar Galactica books. I met Bill through a mutual friend in Hollywood, and when he needed a few pointers, he asked if she knew anyone, and she gave me a call. Of course Bill didnt need much help, just a little advice from someone with experience writing novels. You know, the kind of questions any first-time novelist would have.

And following is the one-stop directions on How to Write Realistic Science Fiction by the MASTER of Science Fiction.

Reflector: Let's start at the beginning. Characters. Where do you start?

1.  
Names. Peoples names won't change much in the future. Hundreds of years ago we had Christopher Columbus, and there's one walking around Hollywood today. Probably not the same guy. So if you want to be realistic, keep your names pretty normal- but not quite like todays names. (i.e., Don't name your character Bill Smith.) But don't waste their names, either. You can use them to be descriptive, for instance if you have a character named George Hamfist, you've just done half the work of

creating his personality in the reader's mind. But make the names easy to remember. A couple Xxryxmics and Thrmrnalums, and your reader can't keep the characters straight in his head.

2.

Technology.

Here's where you want to change things a bit, obviously. Back in the old days we used to say fortnight. Today we say weeks. And today we don't use typewriters. We use electric typewriters. Our cars don't have transmissions they have automatic transmissions. Language naturally changes with improving technology. And in the future the words will be even more specific. For instance, in the future you won't have simple dinner plates, you'll have plastaplates or cryptoplates... or to use an electradoor to enter a hyper-room, you might use a neokey or a plasmacode, and so when you use one of those words, you let the reader infer there are all these other exotic choices, expanding your world yet again, and all by using a simple portmanteau.

And just think- 150 years ago we just had horses, carriages and wagons. Look at what we have today, and just imagine how many transportation options there will be in the future, and then create that future for your readers' minds.

And heres the bonus: EVERY time you use these futurewords, you'll remind the reader subconsciously that he's in the future and keep him immersed in your futureworld instead of having his mind wander away from the story and back to the real world. And you will have done it with just a word or two instead of paragraphs. Efficiency!

### 3. Realistic Characters.

Here is a big secret to successful writing. You want the reader to immediately get a picture of your characters mentally, the first time he meets them. Long ago, a guy named Chekov (editor's note: Not THAT Chekov!) said that if you introduce a phaser in the first act, someone had better get demolecularized in the third act. So when you introduce a new character, you give him a characteristic that really stands out, one that none of the other characters have. And each character should have their own. For instance, if we introduce, a new police officer, you'll say he was tall, thin, and has a glowing smile when he talks.

Now, every time he comes into a scene, you mention that he is smiling but say it in a different way every time. That way you're SHOWING, not just telling that it's this character again. Always show, don't tell. (That's another old chestnut in writing.) You showed this characteristic in the first scene, so according to Chekov, why even mention it if you aren't going to show it again? So the second time we see the character, mention the statuesque, lithe man's scintillating grin. The time after that, maybe say his smile shone in a thoughtful way. Another time you mention that the room lit up with his happy, satisfied expression. Every time you do this it puts a solid image of that character in the reader's head and that helps the character come to life for the reader.

I used this technique in Tekwar. I introduced a character with a certain characteristic that shows the ladies could go wild over him. When I was done with that page, I put a new sheet of paper in the typewriter and typed out 15 or 20 different ways of describing that feature, and stuck it to my office wall, so every time

that character appeared again, I would use the next description, then check it off on that list.

Another great way to show the characters personality instead of telling it is with a speech mannerism, for instance, say if a character is from a different country or culture, have him use a word or two of his native language every other sentence or so, to keep that reader steeped in the story's universe. Say you have a Hispanic character, as there is in Tek Wars. If you only mention he's Hispanic when you introduce him, his mental image in the reader's mind will fade over the course of the book into a generic character. But every time you remind the reader of his heritage, the character will become even more vibrant and well defined. So show him eating tacos, have him say si instead of yes. So again, you're SHOWING, not telling, and as a bonus, you're keeping it realistic, AND making him a richer, more fully developed character every time you do it. Not to brag, but there's a character in the book who practically jumps off the page at you, thanks to some of these techniques.

You can also use verbal mannerisms to drive the plot forward. For instance, this one really great character in Tek War has a mannerism of talking to himself. Some might think that's just a sign of his loneliness or social awkwardness, but that habit also shows his internal conflict, which makes him a more well-rounded character because we know more about what's going on inside his head. It also can drive the plot forward with just a few words, while keeping the narrative character-centered. You have your character say to himself that he has a bad feeling about this, and you give the reader the entire mise en scene of the scene without spending half a page

listing boring details and have the reader get lost in a quagmire of words and description. So its character-building AND it's economical, too.

#### 4. Action

Back to that age-old adage; Show, don't tell. Well, that's what I like to do in my writing. Don't tell the reader it's the future, SHOW them. So instead of saying this guy pulled his wallet out, which could happen today or a hundred years ago, you show the reader that it's the future by saying he pulled out his etherwallet. It conveys the action AND reminds the reader effortlessly, yet again that he is in the future. By constantly putting in these reminders, you avoid having the reader get confused for 3 or 4 seconds when he reads that a character gets into an airbus or a strato-cab.

Another major theme in the story is that the future is much different than today, and one of the subtle ways the book shows that is with time. You see, 200 years ago time was kind of vague. You'd meet your neighbor mid-morning or a bit after noon, because nobody knew exactly what time it was, they just had a general idea based on where the sun was in the sky. Then came watches, and you'd meet your friend at six or the stroke of noon. Today, we have digital watches that can show you down to the hundredth of a second, so we're more specific about the time. For instance, a little while ago I realized that you'd be calling in 5 or 10 minutes, so I got a cup of coffee and waited. That would've never happened 200 years ago, because they didn't think in such small amounts of time back then- because their pace of life didnt demand it and they didn't have the technology to do so.

In the future, life will be all that much busier and time will be even more valuable, so people will be much more precise; they will be hyper-aware of the time. Thus, for even a short pause the person in the future will know how long even those short pauses last, because they'll be so attentive to the passage of time ever since they were young children. You show that strange reality of the future world a few times and you'll be immersing your reader in the story because nobody today is that hyperaware of how many seconds have passed before something happens.

But the reader is getting wrapped up in these characters who are in such a fast-paced and busy futureworld that have a high precision awareness of the passage of time and are innately aware that 13 seconds just passed; not 11 or 14 seconds. And that just adds to the rich tapestry that you are creating your futuristic story upon.

#### 5. Plot

Ahh, plot. The soul of a story. Alfred Hitchcock was one of our greatest storytellers, and he used a device called a McGuffin. This is the object that drives the plot and the characters... often without even being there.

In Tek Wars, from practically the moment he awakes, the protagonist is being driven to get vital information on the story's crime... and his own past... and there are only three or four people who he can get it from. And at every turn of the plot, that information becomes more important- and this big meeting with those people is more vital- and with every passing chapter, the meeting is closer. But tantalizingly, tortuously it is just around the next corner, but still so far away like a carrot on a stick, so that the reader is kept on the edge

of his seat. Like they say, keep them wanting more and more- and more- until that exciting meeting and the climax of the plot finally arrives.

And thats what a great story should do. It should create a new world, populate it with dynamic, interesting, realistic characters, throw in a puzzle or mystery that compels the characters on a journey that the reader can experience vicariously and have the time of his life.

And so, Dear Readers, now you know all you need to write realistic science fiction, so sit down at your typewriters and let your imaginations go boldly where no man has gone before- second star to the right and straight on 'til morning!

We here at the Reflector thank William Shatner and his friend, Ron Goulart for their kindness in granting our interview and for the time they spent with us.

## Mongo and the Flabobian Monk

By

Rachele Heathern

The sun shone across the still plain , and Mongo stood watching the darkness fade from the sky and the scene before him. His plans for the day were simple, go to town gather supplies for the week, then return home and relax for the rest of the day. He had enough work for the rest of the week, but it could wait, because today was his birthday, and this afternoon, the Suokas was going to visit.

He pocketed the keys for his lifter and was distracted by a fireball rushing through the sky and smashing into the field in front of him. There was noise, but not enough. The ground shook, but far too little. But a hole appeared where the item had struck, and it started to glow read and expand outward.

Mongo was about to run to the lift and flee the area, when he saw a doorway appear in the giant rose oak tree to his left. A normal tree which had never had a door in it before- at least that he knew of. A little man in a simple monks attire, holding a banana, emerged from the